Distr.
GENERAL

A/AC.96/SR.471
26 June 1992

ENGLISH
Original: FRENCH

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER'S PROGRAMME
Forty-second session (resumed)

SUMMARY RECORD (PARTIAL)* OF THE 471st MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Friday, 26 June 1992, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. de RIEDMATTEN (Switzerland)

CONTENTS

Approval of the decision by the Sub-Committee of the Whole on Administrative and Financial Matters relating to the revised target for the 1992 General Programmes, namely US$ 386,443,200.

Approval of the recent decision of the Sub-Committee of the Whole on Administrative and Financial Matters relating to the reclassification of four D-1 category posts as D-2.

Approval of the recent decision of the Sub-Committee of the Whole on Administrative and Financial Matters relating to attendance by delegations from the following observer Governments at meetings of the Sub-Committees of the Whole on International Protection and on Administrative and Financial Matters and at informal meetings of the Executive Committee in 1992: Ghana and Rwanda.

---

* No summary record was prepared for the rest of the meeting.

---

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Official Records Editing Section, room E.4108, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

Any corrections to the records of the meetings of this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

GE.92-01824/0057K

The discussion covered in the summary record began at 11.20 a.m.

APPROVAL OF THE DECISION BY THE SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE ON ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL MATTERS RELATING TO THE REVISED TARGET FOR THE 1992 GENERAL PROGRAMMES, NAMELY US$ 386,443,200 (A/AC.96/1992/CRP.1)

The draft decision appearing in document A/AC.96/1992/CRP.1 was adopted without a vote.

APPROVAL OF THE RECENT DECISION OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE ON ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL MATTERS RELATING TO THE RECLASSIFICATION OF FOUR D-1 CATEGORY POSTS AS D-2 (A/AC.96/1992/CRP.2)

The draft decision appearing in document A/AC.96/1992/CRP.2 was adopted without a vote.

APPROVAL OF THE RECENT DECISION OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE ON ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL MATTERS RELATING TO ATTENDANCE BY DELEGATIONS FROM THE FOLLOWING OBSERVER GOVERNMENTS AT MEETINGS OF THE SUB-COMMITTEES OF THE WHOLE ON INTERNATIONAL PROTECTION AND ON ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL MATTERS AND AT INFORMAL MEETINGS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE IN 1992: GHANA AND RWANDA (A/AC.96/1992/CRP.3)

The draft decision appearing in document A/AC.96/1992/CRP.3 was adopted without a vote.

The discussion covered in the summary record ended at 11.25 a.m.

A/AC.96
/SR.
472

UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/AC.96/SR.472
16 November 1992

ENGLISH
Original: FRENCH

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS
HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Forty-third session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 472nd MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Monday, 5 October 1992, at 10 a.m.

Temporary Chairman: Mr. de RIEDMATTEN (Switzerland)
Chairman: Mr. LANUS (Argentina)

CONTENTS

Opening of the session

Election of officers

Statement by the Chairman

Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters

General debate

---

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Official Records Editing Section, room E.4108, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

Any corrections to the records of the meetings of the Executive Committee will be consolidated in a single corrigendum to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

GE.92-02845 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.55 a.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION (item 1 of the provisional agenda)

1. THE TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN, speaking as outgoing Chairman of the forty-second session, declared open the forty-third session of the Executive Committee. The events of the last 12 months seemed to have been more sharply contrasted than those of previous years. Developments on the more hopeful side, such as the many repatriation operations now under way, the repeated displays of solidarity on the part of the international community and the exemplary spirit of selflessness shown by those involved, could be contrasted with more sombre developments, such as the disquieting political destabilization in certain regions of the world, the increasing number of persons forced to flee their country under often tragic circumstances, and the systematic denial of certain fundamental human rights. UNHCR was now being confronted on a daily basis by considerable challenges which severely tested not only its reaction capacity and that of its staff, but also its basic principles and its international credibility.

2. In that connection, UNHCR's fortieth anniversary, which had been celebrated a few months earlier in the presence of several former High Commissioners, should be a source of encouragement and inspiration. The High Commissioners had recalled an institution which had consistently adopted a pragmatic approach by adapting its structures and methods to new political climates and to specific new problems. In each different period, the political will to succeed had made it possible to overcome obstacles that had seemed to be nearly insurmountable.

3. Today's challenges took many forms: migratory flows on an unprecedented scale, complex rescue operations involving both governmental and non-governmental agencies, mobilization of resources in a period of budgetary restrictions and the need to adapt international institutions and their governing mechanisms to a profoundly altered environment. However, if it continued to be inspired by the same political will as in the past, UNHCR would be capable of adjusting its mechanisms and its resources to meet the needs of the present.

4. He had also derived encouragement from the visit he had made, with the support of the Swiss Government, to Cambodia, Thailand and Bangladesh. That mission had helped him realize, first, that the tragic lot of those forced to flee their homes must always be central to UNHCR's concerns. UNHCR had to be untiring in its efforts to seek satisfactory solutions to the agonizing question of their future. Secondly, there was a need to recognize the full extent of the burden borne by countries of asylum; it was clear that more equitable burden sharing was essential. Thirdly, with the overlapping between the local population and refugees that was a feature of certain situations, it was understandable that social tensions and economic distortions could arise; UNHCR had to take them into account. Fourthly, the management of a camp or a repatriation operation was a sophisticated exercise which involved many governmental and non-governmental partners and called for great patience, goodwill, skill and initiative. Fifthly, the staff of UNHCR and of the many

other bodies working in the field under difficult conditions had shown a sense of responsibility and a spirit of self-sacrifice which were wholly admirable. The attacks made recently in some of the media were unjustified.

5. After thanking all those who had assisted him in his task, he concluded by quoting Geneva's motto "Post tenebras lux" and said he was convinced that the more hopeful aspects of the situation he had referred to would prevail over the more sombre ones.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS (agenda item 2)

6. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN invited the members of the Committee to nominate candidates for the office of Chairman.

7. Mr. MANENT (France) nominated Mr. Lanus (Argentina).

8. Mr. GAMA (Brazil) and Mr. FAN Guoxiang (China) seconded the nomination.

9. Mr. Lanus (Argentina) was elected Chairman by acclamation.

10. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN invited the members of the Committee to nominate candidates for the office of Vice-Chairman.

11. Mr. LANG (Austria) nominated Mr. Boddens-Hosang (Netherlands).

12. Mr. BURUSAPATANA (Thailand) and Mr. MWABULAMBO (United Republic of Tanzania) seconded the nomination.

13. Mr. Boddens-Hosang (Netherlands) was elected Vice-Chairman by acclamation.

14. The TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN invited the members of the Committee to nominate candidates for the office of Rapporteur.

15. Mr. BENHIMA (Morocco) nominated Mr. Gubartalla (Sudan).

16. Mr. SAFAEE (Iran) seconded the nomination.

17. Mr. Gubartalla (Sudan) was elected Rapporteur by acclamation.

18. Mr. Lanus (Argentina) took the Chair.

STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

19. The CHAIRMAN recalled that, when the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had been founded in Geneva in 1951, it had been thought that three years would be enough to solve the problem of a small group of persons who had been displaced as a result of the Second World War. More than 40 years later, however, the problem was still unsolved. UNHCR now had increasing responsibilities and a role which went beyond assistance and protection.

20. Referring to the scope of the refugee problem, he reminded the Executive Committee that the situation in the 1950s had arisen as a consequence of the Second World War and that many European refugees had then been taken in by Latin American countries. The first UNHCR regional office had been set up in Bogota. In the 1960s, Africa had been the scene of population displacements, particularly in Rwanda, Zaire, Angola and Ethiopia, as a result of conflicts connected with the process of decolonization. The focus had shifted to Asia in the 1970s, when the boat people had appeared and the most massive exodus of the twentieth century had started because the war in Bangladesh had created 10 million displaced persons. During that decade, the military Governments of the Southern Cone of Latin America had caused large numbers of persons to flee their homes and many had found refuge in Europe. The 1980s had seen the displacement of 5 million Afghans to Pakistan and Iran, as well as displacements in Central America, a region then ravaged by civil wars, repression and violence. In the early 1990s, while problems in Asia, Africa and Latin America persisted, Europe was again experiencing population displacements. The refugee problem thus no longer characterized a single region, but affected the entire planet.

21. In addition, refugees, who had numbered 1 million at the beginning of the 1950s had today reached a figure of over 17 million, even without counting those currently being created by the crisis in the Balkan peninsula. By its very size, that problem called for far more than a policy of humanitarian assistance: it required a political solution, since international peace and security were at stake.

22. With regard to the nature of the phenomenon underlying UNHCR's protection mission, he said that the reasons for population displacements in recent years had gone beyond the framework of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. In addition to fears of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality or opinion, there were fears created by armed conflicts, economic and social distress and chronic natural disasters. Suddenly, the traditional concept of "refugee" was no longer adequate to encompass the problem posed by the displacement of millions of human beings. That was why the Sub-Committee of the Whole on International Protection had undertaken to examine, and was still studying, a whole set of conceptual problems relating to the legal status of refugees, as well as such questions as the situation of persons failing to meet the requirements defined by the 1951 Convention, the criterion governing the cessation of refugee status and the definition of "safe haven". Those questions gave rise to varying reactions, since every region, if not every country, tended to view solutions in terms of its history, its culture and its geographical location.

23. The conceptual and practical problems which were involved in protection and were not always covered by the existing rules had already been discussed at length, but it was as yet too early to think about amending the protection regime established under the existing conventions. What could most usefully be done at the present stage was to consider what guidelines could be given to the High Commissioner in order to facilitate her humanitarian task. The fundamental objective of protection was to find lasting humanitarian solutions, which would be in conformity with the basic principles of asylum and, most importantly, of non-refoulement. It meant, on the one hand, day-by-day protection of individuals or groups which had left their country

and whose fundamental rights were no longer guaranteed and, on the other, the consolidation and updating of the legal regime governing the status and rights of refugees.

24. Latin America, for its part, had been supporting the refugee cause for over a century: the Treaty of Montevideo, which had been the first to include the legal concept of political asylum, had been signed in 1889. The 1928 Havana Convention and the 1933 Montevideo Convention, which developed that concept further, had also inspired the 1951 United Nations Convention. The effectiveness of asylum as a means of dealing with dramatic situations had once again been recognized by the Plan of Action agreed on by the 1989 International Conference on Central American Refugees, which had had considerable success in alleviating the problems of refugees in the region concerned.

25. The challenges which UNHCR had to face were on a scale commensurate with the distress and despair suffered by refugee mothers and children and by entire refugee families. In the belief that life was worth more than law, UNHCR had had the courage to carry out its programme of humanitarian activities even when, as was so often the case, they went beyond the bounds prescribed by legislation. More than any other United Nations agency, UNHCR had thus taken a moral stand which had won it the trust of the international community and had enabled it to act in very difficult situations with prudence and without political bias - whether in intervening with Governments or participating in voluntary repatriation programmes - to bring assistance to human beings pushed to the limit of distress by being forced to flee their homes for fear of physical violence and persecution. The moral dimension of the activities of the Office which Mrs. Ogata headed so effectively also put it in a good position to meet the demands that the international community would continue to make of it as new difficulties and complex new situations arose.

26. Such situations were inevitable, since history was not predictable: from UNHCR's establishment until the beginning of the crisis in the former Yugoslavia, wars had killed 20 million persons, 12 million of whom had fallen victim to civil wars in developing countries. Moreover, history seemed to have reached a turning point and the face of the world, along with the concepts and ideas it carried with it, would now have to change.

27. Through its work, UNHCR was helping to create a climate of trust and solidarity, a vital prerequisite for international peace and security. In the new international context, it should therefore link its humanitarian assistance and protection tasks more closely with efforts to improve coexistence between States within the international system of which they were a part. In carrying out the functions of Chairman of the Executive Committee, he pledged to cooperate fully with all delegations in furthering those objectives.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA AND OTHER ORGANIZATIONAL MATTERS (item 3 of the provisional agenda) (A/AC.96/XLIII/L.1)

28. The provisional agenda (A/AC.96/XLIII/L.1) was adopted.

29. The CHAIRMAN proposed that the Executive Committee should consider at a later stage, under item 7, all applications from governmental delegations for observer status at informal meetings of the Committee and at meetings of its Sub-Committees, in accordance with the decision taken at its thirty-ninth session (A/43/12/Add.1, para. 35).

30. It was so decided.

GENERAL DEBATE (agenda item 4)

31. Mrs. OGATA (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) welcomed all those present at the current session of the Executive Committee. She was particularly pleased to welcome the delegations of Hungary and Ethiopia, which were participating as members in the Committee's annual session for the first time. She thanked the outgoing Chairman for the advice he had given UNHCR in the course of a year which had put it severely to the test in every area. She was sure that she could count on the new Bureau for the necessary support in confronting the challenges of the months ahead.

32. The past year had been a turbulent one: no fewer than 3 million people had been forced to flee in search of safety, while another 1.5 million refugees had returned home voluntarily. The situation had been particularly tragic in Africa. Over 1 million Somalis, fleeing famine, chaos and internal conflicts, had sought asylum in Djibouti, in Ethiopia, in Kenya and in the Yemen. Although the signing of a general peace agreement on Mozambique was to be welcomed, the fact remained that the exodus to Malawi and Zimbabwe had gathered momentum as a result of the drought - only one fifth of urgently needed food supplies had actually reached the inhabitants of that devastated region. In West Africa, some 800,000 refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leone still had no solution to their problem in sight. The media did not always give the same publicity to all refugee situations and UNHCR was striving to redress the balance through its public information strategy.

33. Certain regions of Asia were also experiencing crises. She was continuing to collaborate closely with the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs to overcome the difficulties created by the return to Myanmar of 265,000 refugees who had fled to neighbouring Bangladesh and to ensure an international presence in Myanmar. It had been necessary to strengthen UNHCR's presence in Nepal and to take a series of emergency response measures to deal with an influx of asylum seekers from Bhutan. In South-East Asia, in contrast, voluntary repatriations to Viet Nam, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Cambodia had continued at a steady pace - so far, over 30,000 Vietnamese had returned home. However, the situation of refugees remaining in first asylum countries was still far from being resolved.

34. In Central America, continued progress had been made towards durable solutions as a result of the International Conference on Central American Refugees. The reintegration of returnees was about to enter the realm of development phase and UNDP would shortly be taking over the process. The Peace Accord concluded in El Salvador had consolidated the reconciliation process. The launching of the first phase of the Plan of Action for Repatriation to Guatemala and the establishment of a UNHCR presence in the

major target zones were significant steps towards the solution of the remaining refugee problem in that part of the world. In Haiti, however, the deteriorating economic situation, the absence of political solutions and the harshness of sanctions had combined to keep alive the risk of a major exodus. In that connection, it was important for Governments in the region to maintain an open humanitarian policy.

35. In the Middle East, there was reason to fear that the deteriorating situation in northern Iraq, the difficulties involved in the renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding with the Government and the onset of winter might lead to new outflows of Kurdish refugees. To prevent such an eventuality, there was an urgent need to build up stocks for the winter and to review cross-border operations.

36. In Europe, over 2.6 million persons had been displaced or were under siege as a result of the conflict now raging in the former Yugoslavia. UNHCR had launched a comprehensive humanitarian operation to aid the victims, which had been broadly endorsed by the international ministerial meeting convened on 29 July 1992. That crisis had reminded the world that no region was safe from the refugee problem and had given fresh impetus to the debate on the concepts underlying protection of refugees and displaced persons and prevention of refugee flows.

37. It was not yet possible to assess the consequences of the brutal changes which had taken place on the international scene and which, in some cases, had led to the break-up of the State and, in others, to the breakdown of Government authority. The dynamics of displacement had evolved and become more complex, while the ethnic factor was today a common denominator in many refugee problems. As humanitarian action increasingly became part of a wider process for restoring peace in a changing world, the last 12 months had given a new dimension to UNHCR's role and confronted it with new kinds of difficulties.

38. As to activities undertaken in 1992, lessons learned and what still remained to be done, she stressed that her goal was to strengthen UNHCR's response capacity and emergency preparedness and to cooperate more closely with other agencies, donors and non-governmental organizations. Measures had been taken to establish emergency response teams, to diversify emergency training and to stockpile basic relief supplies. Standby agreements had been concluded with a number of non-governmental organizations for the secondment of staff. The skills of the United Nations Volunteers had been called upon on a number of occasions. Those new arrangements had played a key role in UNHCR's ability to respond to recent crises.

39. However, the effectiveness of UNHCR's action in emergencies was also determined by the prevailing security situation. Humanitarian crises were increasingly tending to arise in the midst of armed conflict and UNHCR was having to provide protection and assistance to the displaced in conditions of insecurity and anarchy. In that connection, she paid tribute to all those who were working in the field, at great personal risk, to keep the relief pipeline open and, above all, to the staff of UNHCR, the United Nations, non-governmental and other organizations who had lost their lives in the defence of that cause. The meeting on security matters held at the request of

UNHCR at the level of the United Nations system had resulted in a number of concrete recommendations, which had already begun to be implemented. In the face of emergencies on an unprecedented scale, UNHCR had had to turn on occasion to the armed forces for logistical support - in the post-cold war era, there was everything to be gained by channelling the enormous capacity of the military to serve humanitarian purposes.

40. Emergency response should be coupled with energetic political initiatives to promote the safe and voluntary return of refugees. Although the fact that 1.5 million refugees had been repatriated in 1992 was to be welcomed, it should be recognized that refugee movements had become more and more difficult to control and that, as a result, returns had become more complex and precarious.

41. In Mozambique, Liberia and South Africa, drought, food shortages, conflicts and political confrontations had been a set-back to hopes of rapid repatriation. In addition, although over 60,000 refugees had returned spontaneously to Angola, fragile security and the presence of large numbers of mines continued to slow down progress towards solutions, even though difficulties were gradually being overcome as new funding was received. UNHCR had also made arrangements for the voluntary repatriation of Burundi refugees from the United Republic of Tanzania. It was taking an active part in negotiations and activities under the auspices of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) with a view to finding a solution to the plight of Rwandese refugees.

42. The situation in Afghanistan clearly illustrated the difficulties posed by repatriation today. Over 1 million Afghans who had fled to Pakistan and to the Islamic Republic of Iran had returned to their country in 1992, but the explosive situation and the climate of insecurity prevailing in Afghanistan were seriously hampering the funding and implementation of reintegration and rehabilitation measures. The Secretary-General and the Under-Secretary-General, Mr. Eliasson, had been warned that, unless all agencies and donors were vigorously and urgently mobilized, there was a risk that a further humanitarian catastrophe might occur with the onset of winter.

43. Repatriation was a difficult undertaking, often more complex politically and operationally than emergency response. Although planning and preparation played an important part, the key element was still innovation and flexibility, as had been shown by UNHCR's operations in Cambodia. Within the framework of the 1991 Paris Peace Agreements, some 130,000 Cambodians had returned to date, mainly from Thailand. Barring a major setback, UNHCR expected all Cambodian refugees in Thailand to have been repatriated by early 1993, in time to take part in the elections. In order to meet that deadline, however, it had had to modify assistance options to take account of the lack of available, mine-free land for allocation to returnees. Despite the difficulties, the sustained political will of the international community should make it possible to secure the long-term future of such returnees.

44. In south-eastern Ethiopia, a new initiative had been launched which abandoned traditional distinctions between refugees, returnees and the affected population. UNHCR had worked in association with other United Nations and non-governmental organizations to assess and meet the

needs of the entire community and thus stabilize the population, with a view to breaking the vicious circle of exile, return and internal displacement, followed by renewed exile to an area of chronic under-development, drought and instability.

45. Those repatriation operations underlined the importance of quick-impact development projects to bridge the gap between relief and longer-term development. In association with UNDP and other agencies, UNHCR had made significant progress in that area, within the framework of the International Conference on Central American Refugees. The lessons learned in that part of the world were now being applied in Cambodia.

46. However, much remained to be done and the respective roles and responsibilities of the agencies at various stages of the relief-to-development continuum needed to be clarified and dovetailed. Indeed, that was an area where an improvement in inter-agency coordination was urgently needed and the extent to which the international community was able to meet the development challenge would affect UNHCR's ability to maintain the impetus in repatriation and to find genuine and lasting solutions to refugee problems.

47. The other lasting solution provided by resettlement, in cases where the lives or fundamental well-being of refugees depended on it, should also not be overlooked. With the proliferation of refugee crises around the world, the need for resettlement places had grown and UNHCR was counting on the generosity of the international community, especially on behalf of detainees being released in the former Yugoslavia.

48. After enhancing emergency response and promoting solutions leading to repatriation, prevention was the third cornerstone of UNHCR's strategy. Given the close links between serious human rights violations and refugee flows, it had sought to reinforce contacts with human rights bodies within the United Nations system and was actively participating in preparations for the World Conference on Human Rights. Together with other organizations and with the help of some Governments, it had stepped up its training and advisory activities as a part of efforts to establish institutions in eastern Europe and in the CIS countries to pre-empt and manage the problems of massive displacements.

49. UNHCR had undertaken increasingly effective initiatives to provide protection and assistance to displaced populations within countries of origin, notably in the former Yugoslavia, Sri Lanka and the Horn of Africa. Experience in the former Yugoslavia had shown that an international presence was an essential element of prevention. While it was difficult to quantify its effects with any accuracy and while it did not always succeed in preventing forced displacements, it nevertheless enabled the international community to see to it that populations were given humanitarian treatment and it could have restraining effects.

50. Like solutions, prevention should be applied with imagination and flexibility to each situation encountered. Thus, in the context of the Somali crisis, UNHCR's prevention activities had taken the form of supplying food, tools and essential commodities from Kenya, where UNHCR was based, so

that people were not compelled to cross borders in search of humanitarian assistance. UNHCR was coordinating that aid as part of a comprehensive United Nations plan to accelerate relief operations in that war-torn country.

51. Such cross-border operations had considerable implications in terms of resources and, in order to be effective, required the full and entire cooperation of the agencies, the acquiescence of the parties concerned and the wholehearted commitment of the international community. Assistance to internally displaced persons, as in Yugoslavia, could be successful only to the extent that their safety could be assured and an early solution found; it was thus entirely dependent on the political will of the parties concerned. Although prevention was a promising strategy, it also had its limits. It could not be a substitute for asylum, but was rather a supplement to it.

52. International protection had always been the basis of UNHCR's three-pronged strategy. The focus of protection had always been to meet refugees' needs from the time of flight until the achievement of a durable solution. However, the sheer scale and complexity of contemporary population displacements had placed serious strains on that orthodox approach to refugee protection, had weakened international solidarity and had sometimes seriously jeopardized the principle of asylum. Whatever the part of the world concerned, the question had arisen as to how heavy a burden countries of asylum could legitimately tolerate: as a result, it was vital that international protection should be given a coherent yet flexible framework which safeguarded fundamental principles and premises, while at the same time taking into account current realities and enabling UNHCR to play a creative role, not only in addressing the problems of refugees, but also in solving the refugee problem.

53. It was with that objective in mind that she had set up an internal working group, chaired by the Director of International Protection, to recommend a strategy for strengthening international protection in the 1990s. The conclusions of that working group had been submitted to the Executive Committee in the Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/799). She hoped that the Committee would endorse the new thrust which underlay many of the Office's current activities.

54. The Note did not seek to redefine UNHCR's mandate or to extend its competence to new groups of persons. Rather, it reflected realities and affirmed UNHCR's willingness to play a clearly defined role in the prevention and solution of refugee problems. There was also no question of substituting protection in the country of origin for traditional humanitarian action on behalf of refugees and asylum seekers. The institution of asylum had to be preserved and efforts continued to establish efficient and fair procedure which would ensure that valid claims to refugee status were recognized. At the same time, UNHCR should show sufficient flexibility to develop concerted and comprehensive regional arrangements which could successfully solve specific problems of displacement in different regions of the world.

55. A regional arrangement which combined a commitment to provide protection for those who needed it, clear policies for immigration and development assistance and a coherent information strategy could help to solve the problem of mixed movements of refugees and migrants in Europe. She hoped that the

rationalization of UNHCR's priorities, structures and resources in Europe would help to strengthen its ability to engage Governments and other actors in a constructive dialogue with a view to adopting a regional approach.

56. It was evident that the magnitude of the challenges exceeded the capacity of UNHCR alone. Whether prevention, protection or solutions were involved the execution of coherent and comprehensive strategies meant that new impetus had to be given to the existing partnership between UNHCR and Governments, other United Nations agencies and international, regional and non-governmental organizations. Indeed, the Office had rarely enjoyed such close cooperation or received such strong encouragement from Governments. She was deeply grateful to them for their support, whether diplomatic, political, financial or human. There were close operational links between UNHCR and its sister agencies, particularly WFP and UNICEF, as well as with IOM. The Office's collaboration with the Department of Humanitarian Affairs continued to be fruitful and its relations with ICRC were gaining in depth day by day with its repeated interventions in areas of conflict. Lastly, she wished to pay tribute to the many non-governmental organizations which had given ample proof of their commitment and which were the spearhead of many aspects of refugee operations, often under the most difficult of conditions.

57. The many different actors on the scene made the question of coordination even more crucial. Coordination, however, was not a panacea. It required considerable investment in terms of time and energy and could not in any circumstances be a substitute for the individual or collective capacity of agencies. The objective of coordination should be to enhance comparative advantages. Furthermore, in the case of complex humanitarian actions, coordination could best be ensured on the basis of the principle of assigning one agency the lead role, such as that assumed by UNHCR in refugee or refugee-like situations as in northern Iraq and now in former Yugoslavia. Public opinion was also among UNHCR's concerns in that regard, especially at a time when racism and xenophobia were on the increase in some parts of the world. UNHCR had therefore stepped up its public information campaign in order to build greater support for the humanitarian values and traditions in whose name it had been created. She urged all political leaders and opinion-makers to join UNHCR in stemming the tide of intolerance against refugees and asylum seekers.

58. Lastly, she referred to the problem of UNHCR's resources. Unlike other agencies of the United Nations system, UNHCR could hardly be selective in assuming its responsibilities. It could not avoid them when a new crisis occurred and when the international community urged it to take action. What it could and should do was constantly to look for ways of better managing and utilizing its resources. One year of unprecedented need had been followed by yet another. Out of US$ 1.1 billion - the estimated total of its needs - UNHCR had received US$ 751.9 million as at 29 September 1992. She was grateful to those who had made those contributions, particularly as the donor base had widened. However, she felt bound to appeal to "traditional" donors not to reduce their contributions at a time when needs were constantly increasing. Furthermore, she planned to undertake a number of personal initiatives later in the year to diversify sources of governmental funding. Encouraged by the significant increase in private funding, she was continuing her approaches in that area.

59. As operational challenges become more complex, UNHCR needed continuously to reassess both its approach to programmes and its management and monitoring systems. Its capacity and the capacity of its operational partners for needs assessment and programme design had to be markedly improved, so that the effectiveness of programmes could be measured against clear objectives. In the course of the coming year, she intended to take steps to enhance UNHCR's programming skills. Efforts to strengthen the Office's financial accountability should be matched by increased effectiveness in programme delivery.

60. Such measures should also help UNHCR respond better to the needs of the majority of refugees or, in other words, women and children. Training activities now under way were designed to provide staff with the necessary tools to incorporate the guidelines on refugee women into programme design and implementation. Thanks to the generosity of the Norwegian Government, UNHCR would from now on have the benefit of the services of a Coordinator for Refugee Children. She hoped that the Office would be able to develop educational opportunities for such children with a view to enabling them to overcome the trauma of exile and to face the future bravely once they returned home.

61. Better programming should also go hand in hand with a more ecological approach. At the Rio Summit, UNHCR had fully supported the Declaration on Environment and Development and it had to help ensure that any environmental damage caused in and around refugee camps was kept to a minimum and cooperate in repairing such damage. UNHCR had explained its policy on the subject in a conference room paper and hoped that the necessary funding would be made available to enable it to appoint a coordinator on environmental issues.

62. Management of funds and programmes was indissolubly linked to the question of human resources. The huge number of emergencies that UNHCR had had to deal with over the past two years had placed a heavy burden on the shoulders of its staff, who had proved equal to the challenge. However, if the Office was to maintain the same standards of competence and commitment, it would need to manage its human resources more carefully and creatively. Its staff, who were being constantly called on to respond to emergencies or to cope with priority tasks, were moving from one operation to another or else were being hurriedly recruited in a way which satisfied neither their own career aspirations nor the needs of sound management. As a result, there was need for a coherent policy which took account of UNHCR's current role and responsibilities. She intended personally to undertake a qualitative review of UNHCR's staffing requirements and to devise a human resources strategy which would enable the Office to respond efficiently to the challenges of the post-cold war era. In addition, a dynamic and rational policy had been adopted to redress the gender imbalance within UNHCR.

63. The six points of prevention, preparedness, protection, solutions, partnership and resources represented in a nutshell the tremendous challenges with which UNHCR was confronted. In conclusion, she recalled that her predecessor, Mr. Stoltenberg, had told the Committee that he hoped that the issue of population movements would be placed on the international political agenda. Today it was on that agenda and it was through political initiatives that the root causes of displacement could be addressed. It was also through

political agreement that durable solutions could be found for refugee problems. Humanitarian action could pave the way for political action, but could never be a substitute for it.

64. As humanitarian action became linked with peacemaking and peace-keeping efforts, UNHCR's task was to see to it that the question of refugees and displacement remained on the political agenda, while at the same time preserving its non-political and humanitarian approach. The task of political bodies was to support humanitarian action, while resisting the temptation to use humanitarian avenues to overcome political obstacles. Nor should political action jeopardize the speed, efficiency and neutrality of humanitarian aid. Political bodies and humanitarian agencies needed to work hand in hand.

65. The unexpected ending of the cold war had led many to hope that the fruits of a warmer political climate could be reaped immediately, but time had shown those hopes to be unfounded. UNHCR should remain wary of the dangers, lest they engulf it, and should be prepared to seize opportunities, lest they escape it. Despite the inherent contradictions of the era which was now beginning, it was with an acute sense of responsibility and a feeling of intense satisfaction that UNHCR was continuing its work. It was aware of the vital importance of humanitarian action in the post-cold war period and it also knew that it was serving a noble cause and was proud of the fact that a large number of voluntary returns had been recorded over the past 12 months. UNHCR was operating at the extreme limits of its capacity, but, thanks to the extraordinary support of the international community and of the Executive Committee, it was ready and willing to continue with its humanitarian task.

66. Mrs. LAFONTANT-MANKARIOUS (United States of America) said that, shortly after the Executive Committee's adoption, at its forty-second session, of the High Commissioner's plan for responding to emergency situations, a spate of emergencies had begun which had strained the reserves of all humanitarian agencies beyond their operational limits. UNHCR's actions in the former Yugoslavia, the Horn of Africa and northern Iraq had subjected it to criticism by the public, which judged it according to the speed and effectiveness of its operations, whereas in fact it was obliged to coordinate its activities with those of a wide range of United Nations agencies, private institutions and donors.

67. While commending UNHCR for its handling of the refugee situation in Myanmar, she urged the Government of that country to accept the presence of UNHCR monitors, so that refugees who had already indicated a willingness to return to their countries would be able to do so. At the same time, the Government of Bangladesh should maintain an open door to asylum seekers and work with UNHCR on voluntary repatriation efforts. The United States, which had contributed generously to UNHCR's programme in Bangladesh, appealed to other donors not to forget the many refugees who did not make newspaper headlines. In Bhutan, over 100,000 persons of Bhutanese origin had fled to India and then to western Nepal to seek refuge. Thanks to its new emergency response mechanism, UNHCR had responded with speed and efficiency and had saved many lives.

68. On the subject of international protection, UNHCR had clearly demonstrated, by its comprehensive response to the humanitarian crisis in the Republics of the former Yugoslavia and in northern Iraq, the need to combine emergency response with protection activities. It was likely that the international community would continue to request the Office to intervene in situations where refugees, internally displaced persons and affected civilian populations were intermingled. Similarly, the United States welcomed the Note on International Protection (A/AC.96/799), which was an important contribution to the international debate on refugee protection. At the same time, the Executive Committee should recognize that constraints of personnel, of financing and perhaps of mandate might prevent UNHCR from taking on all the additional responsibilities considered in the document.

69. The United States welcomed UNHCR's use in 1992 of general programme funds for voluntary repatriation activities, particularly in Angola. In Afghanistan and Cambodia, it had capitalized on political will to achieve significant success in 1992. The United States was proud to have contributed nearly US$ 31 million to those three important repatriation programmes.

70. It was imperative that UNHCR's general programme budget proposals should be consistent with the guidelines approved by the Executive Committee. If that were to be achieved, general programmes should be stepped up and priorities reoriented, while UNHCR's programme capacity should be strengthened. With the emergencies now building up in the Horn of Africa and in southern Africa, an increase in the general programme budget would probably be needed.

71. The protection of women and children was not yet of significant concern to many UNHCR field officers, despite the policies and guidelines laid down by the Executive Committee and its Sub-Committees on the subject. The number of women who were still victims of rape was the best example of the failure of traditional protection measures. The time had come to guarantee the physical protection of refugee women by ensuring that there were female field officers present in every emergency situation. Similarly, UNHCR programmes should be more closely linked to the needs of the vast majority of refugees, namely, women and children, and care should be taken to prevent programming mistakes. If necessary, her Government would be willing to assist in funding that effort by an increase in the general programme budget.

72. At the June meeting of the Executive Committee, the High Commissioner had proposed that emergency humanitarian operations should be carried out in partnership with other agencies. She herself fully supported the coordination of UNHCR's activities with those of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Jan Eliasson. She further welcomed UNHCR's collaboration with UNDP in Central America and hoped that returning Angolans would benefit from the Special Relief Programme in Angola.

73. Mr. MORLAND (United Kingdom), speaking on behalf of the European Community and its member States, said that, in 1992, UNHCR had had to take on a particularly heavy workload, especially in Europe and Africa, in addition to the many critical situations it was already having to face all over the world. In Europe, in the former Yugoslav Republics, more than 2.5 million people had been forced to leave their homes as a result of conflicts and deliberate

persecution in the name of "ethnic cleansing", a practice unreservedly condemned by the Community and its member States. He welcomed the appointment of UNHCR as the lead agency in that humanitarian crisis and also paid tribute to the role of UNPROFOR in delivering humanitarian aid under difficult circumstances. The Community and its member States, which had made substantial cash and food contributions, had also participated in the airlift to Sarajevo, provided logistical support and helped UNHCR and local authorities prepare winter shelter. However, he remained convinced that the best way of helping the majority of victims was by delivering relief to their homes or at least as near as possible to their place of origin.

74. Africa, with almost one third of the world's total number of refugees, was facing problems on an unprecedented scale. Clearly, the tragic events that were occurring in the Horn of Africa were beyond the scope of any one agency. In addition to the active role played by ICRC, he therefore welcomed the coordination of the activities of United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations working under the umbrella of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs. The Community and its member States had already responded swiftly and generously to United Nations humanitarian programmes in Africa, a continent which was also suffering from a disastrous drought, and they would continue to do so.

75. Despite those and other emergencies to which it had had to respond, UNHCR had nevertheless been able to record some progress in its voluntary repatriation programmes. Thus, in Cambodia, some 140,000 people had returned home from Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia under UNHCR auspices. In addition, at the beginning of the year, some 1.8 million Iraqi refugees who had fled to Iran and Turkey had returned home voluntarily. Thanks to UNHCR's winterization programmes and to the efforts of a number of non-governmental organizations, the people of northern Iraq had begun to rebuild 1,700 villages which had been destroyed. With the ending of the emergency phase, other United Nations agencies had taken over from UNHCR, but, since that time, the Government of Iraq had continually obstructed the United Nations in its attempts to deliver humanitarian assistance. In the south of the country too, the United Nations presence had been severely restricted. The Community and its member States condemned such actions, which could only perpetuate the suffering already inflicted on the population by its own Government. It was in Afghanistan, as a result of the political changes that had taken place the previous April, that the largest number of voluntary repatriations had been achieved. Unfortunately, the hostilities that had recently broken out in Kabul had resulted in further population displacements.

76. If the High Commissioner's hope of a decade of voluntary repatriation was to be fulfilled, UNHCR would need to have the capacity to respond quickly to changes in the political climate. In December 1991, the Sub-Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters had decided to include US$ 18 million in the 1992 general programmes target for voluntary repatriation and had agreed that that provision should be maintained in future years. In the belief that voluntary repatriation should be at the heart of UNHCR's programmes, the Community and its member States strongly supported that change. However, UNHCR aid, which was limited in time, could not in itself guarantee the future of returnees. The Community and its member States therefore welcomed the

establishment of the Inter-Agency Working Group on the Reintegration of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons, which had held its first meeting in January.

77. In addition, the Community and its member States greatly valued the dialogue which was already under way between UNHCR, Governments, member States and the Commission of the European Communities. The regular meetings of the Sub-Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters had been particularly useful in drawing the attention of Governments to many important issues concerning the running of UNHCR, including income and expenditure, staffing and key programme activities such as voluntary repatriation.

78. In addition, over the past year, the Sub-Committee on International Protection had for the first time held a regular series of meetings. Given the complexity of today's refugee situations and the expansion of UNHCR's activities, protection should form an integral part of the Office's activities. It would therefore be useful if, at future meetings, the Sub-Committee could consider protection issues in the context of UNHCR's actual programmes, with contributions, as appropriate, from the Office's geographical divisions, as well as from its jurists. In that context, he welcomed the Note on International Protection prepared by the Working Group on International Protection. The Community and its member States were ready to play their full part in discussing and developing the important ideas it contained, such as UNHCR's role in the country of origin, group determination and safety zones.

79. The number of asylum seekers had continued to rise in western Europe, reaching an estimated 545,000 by the end of 1991. More than 3 million persons had claimed asylum in Europe since 1984, creating social strains which had become openly apparent in some countries in 1992. Without repudiating the obligations they had contracted under the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol, the Community and its member States could not ignore the huge increase in the number of manifestly unfounded requests for asylum or the fact that a very large proportion of applicants had become displaced illegally within the European Community without taking up opportunities for protection available to them closer to home. Such abuses diverted staff and other resources from more productive activities, undermined the natural sympathy felt for refugees and jeopardized the interests of the small minority in genuine need of protection. The member States of the European Community fully endorsed the Working Group's conclusion that asylum was an essential option. However, the right to seek and to enjoy asylum did not entail the right to travel to a particular country in order to apply for it. A more effective distinction had to be made between genuine protection needs and the migration preferences expressed by individuals. In that regard, he reminded the Executive Committee that the refoulement of rejected applicants was a matter for the discretion of individual States, in accordance with national immigration laws.

80. UNHCR's budget, which was already well in excess of US$ 1 billion in 1992, was a reflection of the enormous demands placed upon it. In the course of the financial year that had just elapsed, the Community and its member States had together contributed nearly 40 per cent of UNHCR's total budget. In 1992, it had still been the Office's principal donor and had also

provided increased logistic and practical support. In that connection, he urged all Governments to give financial or other support to UNHCR's activities or to increase the contribution they were already making.

81. The unprecedented scale and complexity of humanitarian situations raised fundamental questions about UNHCR's capacity to respond effectively and about the role of the Executive Committee in guiding UNHCR's work. With the decline in the proportion of the budget devoted to general programmes, which represented UNHCR's core expenditure, the way in which the annual budget had traditionally been considered was now open to question. The size and nature of UNHCR's staff and its relationship with Governments, other United Nations agencies and its implementing partners in the field needed to be reviewed in the light of the new problems and opportunities facing UNHCR. Those issues should be examined thoroughly both in the Executive Committee and in the Sub-Committee on Administrative and Financial Matters. In that regard, the Community and its member States fully supported UNHCR's efforts to define priorities and to redeploy its activities in Europe.

82. In conclusion, he paid tribute to the memory of UNHCR staff members who had met a tragic death in the service of the humanitarian cause.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.